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ABSTRACT

One approach to the implementation of community education is to solicit involvement and support for the idea from the informal power structure. The first step is to identify the informal power structure; one method is the reputational technique, in which selected members of a variety of organizations each nominate at least five people who have influence on community decision making. The second step in the implementation of community education is to invite the identified leaders to a meeting to discuss an idea for improving the quality of living in their community. Showing the film, "To Touch a Child," or a similar community education presentation is appropriate at this time. It is also very important that the chairperson of this meeting do research on the identified leaders to find out their interests and then direct different aspects of the presentation to these interests, showing each the benefit of community education. From this session, a study committee can be formed and participants asked to serve. A third step in this process is the formation of study groups to explore community education further. At the same time, a planned effort to build trust is essential. The facilitator should help move the group forward to identify needs and act on them. When plans have been made, the study committee can present them to the local board of education for approval. Using the informal power structure in the community can be one of the best ways to ensure the acceptance of community education. (KC)

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Community Education Implementation: One Way - Not The Only Way

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After attending a Community Education Workshop you're convinced that such a program is needed in your school. What can you do? This article will present one, among many, possible approaches. The approach subscribes to the idea of doing things with people, and not to people.

Every community has a formal and informal power structure. The formal power structure consists of those people who, by their titles, i.e. mayor, school superintendent, bank president, wield power. People in the informal power structure also play a key role in community decision making. Many times these people are not the same ones identified in the formal power structure. One approach in implementing a good idea is to identify the informal power structure and solicit their involvement and support for an idea, in this case community education. The question becomes how does one identify the key informal leaders of the community?

One Method

The first step is to identify the informal power structure. The reputational technique is one method developed by Floyd Hunter (1953) to determine the informal power structure. When implementing this method, a panel of individuals is selected from a variety of public, civic, and professional organizations. Each

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is asked to name separately a minimum of five (5) people who have influence in the community decision-making process. More specifically, who would you go to for support of an idea that would improve the community? Those identified are also asked to identify separately a minimum of five (5) leaders who might also help on the community project. If more refinement is needed, the process is repeated again. From this procedure you have now identified the top 15-20 reputed leaders in the community. It is important in utilizing the above technique that confidentiality be maintained, otherwise honest answers might not be forthcoming.

The second step in the implementation of Community Education is to invite the identified leaders to a meeting to discuss an idea for improving the quality of living in their community. Show the film, TO TOUCH A CHILD, or a similar community education presentation is appropriate at this time. Also, it is very important that the chairperson of this meeting do his homework on each of the identified leaders. This means, find out the interests of each and then gear different aspects of your presentation to these interests, showing each the benefit of Community Education. For example, the mayor might be shown the economic value of working more closely with the public school; another identified leader interested in physical fitness might be presented the benefits and opportunities of using the weight training room in the high school; while the president of the largest company in the area might identify with re-training, wellness programs and recreational opportunities available for employees when public school facilities are used more fully.

From this session a study committee is suggested and those invited are asked to serve. If a person cannot serve, he/she is asked to recommend someone that would support his/her views.

A third step in this process would be to form study groups to further explore Community Education. Visits to communities having community schools might be in order. Also, resource people experienced in Community Education could be available for the study sessions.

At the same time, a special sub-study group should be organized to identify existing community problems that might be lessened if such an idea were implemented. Other committees might study possible funding sources, existing facilities and programs, staffing possibilities, and publicity.

Build Teamwork

When most new groups get together for the first time, trust is lacking. A lack of trust impairs the effectiveness of the group; therefore, a planned effort to build trust is essential. The facilitator of the study committee, which could be the principal or teacher will need to build a working relationship among committee members. Time spent building this trust relationship pays big dividends. Such techniques as achievement motivation and strength bombardment are possibilities. People need to have opportunities to learn more about each other, and learn what each holds dear.

To move the group forward, the facilitator will need to help the committee realize what they want. Remember, it's not

what the facilitator wants, but what committee members see as needs. The facilitator is a synthesizer.

In nearly every group there are people that are open and willing to look at new ideas. The synthesizer needs to recognize these people, encourage them, and be sure to give them credit for ideas and suggestions generated. If the idea is solid, others in the group soon lend support. It is through the above process that power structure committee studying Community Education supports the community education concept. As a result of their study sessions and dialogue, commitment is moved to a plan of action. The study committee now presents it to the local board of education for their commitment and sanction. Using the identified informal power structure of a community, as a study committee for a viable idea might be one of the best ways to insure its acceptance. Why not use the informal power structure in your community to be catalytic force behind the implementation of Community Education?

Bibliography

Hunter, Floyd, Community Power Structure, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1953.